

Iowa Joint Operator Certification and Training Coordination Committee

Friday, November 17, 2006 – IAMU Office, Ankeny, Iowa

Meeting Minutes

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

The meeting was called to order by Chair Jon Martens at 10:10 a.m.

Present were:

• Dale Acheson, IAWWA	• Brad Robbins, IRWA
• Jane Enfield, IDNR	• Harris Seidel, IWPCA
• Marty Hoffert, IAWWA	• Laurie Sharp, IDNR
• Steve Hopkins, IDNR	• Jill Soenen, IAMU
• Steve Jones, ISU	• Jim Stricker, IWPCA
• Marty Kunkel, IAMU	• Jim Utter, IWPCA
• Jon Martens, IAWWA	• Mike Wildung, IRWA
• Steve Mrstik, KCC	

Visitors: None

2. Adoption of Agenda

Moved by Marty Hoffert, seconded by Jim Stricker, to adopt the agenda as distributed by e-mail a week earlier. Motion carried.

[NOTE: An agenda can be obtained from any Joint Committee member within the three days preceding a meeting of the Joint Committee.]

3. Approval of September 15, 2006 Minutes

Moved by Brad Robbins, seconded by Steve Mrstik, to approve the minutes as distributed. Motion carried.

4. Public Comment

None.

5. Unfinished Business/Assignments

a. Press Release

Rhonda Guy was not present.

b. NTK Subcommittee Progress Report

Laurie Sharp reported that this project is currently on hold waiting for the consultant to have time for it.

c. Operator by Affidavit Subcommittee

Jon Martens reported that this subcommittee met on October 27. A draft document will be sent out soon to subcommittee members, and a second meeting is planned for December to review comments. The goal is to develop a document which outlines the responsibilities and expectations of all parties so that the owner, affidavit operator, and the IDNR Field Office staff are all on the same page.

A discussion followed on the differences between affidavit operation and contract operation. In the former, a nearby certified operator contracts to serve and accepts full responsibility for the operation of a small facility. By Rule, this arrangement is limited to Grades I and II facilities. There is currently no further rule or written policy on what is involved in this type of "operation." Expectations and practice vary somewhat between Regions.

Contract operation, on the other hand, is an option for facilities of ANY size. There is NO provision in the Rules for contract operation. Just as a discussion example, we assume or expect full-time, 40 hours/week on-site from the operator in responsible charge (ORC) of a Grade III or IV facility; but this is not in the Rules even for operation by the owner. Does this imply that in either case something fewer than 40 hours/week on-site by the ORC might be acceptable in certain circumstances?

Pursuing this hypothetical situation one step further, would a 28E Agreement between two cities for contracting or sharing the services of an ORC of the proper grade be accepted? Would it work? Steve Hopkins pointed out that operational responsibility goes beyond simply meeting effluent standards; it includes the timely and adequate maintenance of the facility needed to protect the city's investment.

d. Grade A Training Subcommittee

Brad Robbins reported that this subcommittee will begin its work early next year after the current round of Grade A training has been completed. Some Grade A operators are asking if they can skip the training and simply retake the easy Grade A test to retain their certification. Answer: No.

e. Facilities Classification Subcommittee

Jim Stricker reported that a subcommittee has been formed, and will meet on December 11, 2006.

f. Water Distribution Amendment

Jon Martens introduced this subject. The constructive hour-long discussion is summarized here.

The basic proposal is for separate-but-equal requirements for renewal of WT and WD certification.

Grades I and II WT would require 1.0 CEU every two years.

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Holding both WT and WD would require 2.0 CEUS every two years.

Grades III and IV WT would require 2.0 CEUs every two years.

Grades III and IV WD would require 2.0 CEUs every two years.

Holding both WT and WD would require 4.0 CEUs every two years.

Points in Opposition

This will double the expense for earning CEUs.

This will double the time required off the job.

Is this really required by EPA, or is it just another burden laid on us by some bureaucrat?

Operators are against this.

Employers are against this.

Utilities simply do not want to spend the money on training.

The larger utilities are the most outspoken against this.

We should also recognize that this would be hardest on the smaller utilities who are already pressed for funds and staff time on the job.

Our WT certification used to cover WD also; why can't we just go back to that?

Could this proposal be softened; for example, to only 1.5 CEUs for Grades I and II holding both WT and WD and 3.0 CEUs for Grades III and IV holding both WT and WD?

If this becomes a requirement, some will drop one or the other certification.

Points In Favor

This is coming. We should get started and prepare for it, not wait until the requirement is on top of us. Keep in mind what this is all about—raising the knowledge and performance level of those working in WD, to improve the safety and quality of drinking water delivered to our consumers.

Our present Rules send a message; renewal of WD certification now requires only 2.5 hours of training every two years for Grades I and II and only 5.0 hours for Grades III and IV. The message is, compared to WT, you're not very important. Is this the message we want to send?

One bad incident in the WD system could make the point that WD IS important and that training is not so expensive after all.

Only the WD superintendent or supervisor needs to be certified now; no one else working in the WD system needs to be certified.

Some water superintendents say: If training is required, then I can send my employees to the training. If it is not required, I'm not allowed to send them.

New hires now take separate 100-question exams for WT and for WD. Many think the new requirement is already in place. (Advice: Keep right on thinking so.)

Many (most?) operators are already earning enough and more CEUs to meet the proposed new requirements.

Comments on Training

There's not enough training out there; some is not very good; and there is too much repeat training. (These are continuous complaints.)

Response: There is a ton of training out there, and most of it is very good. If you are tired of going to the same training year after year and really want to learn something new and different, LOOK FOR IT; there is plenty available.

Strategic Plan

We have a strategic plan. It includes the proposal for separate-but-equal requirements for WT and WD. All of our member organizations were a part of the process, and we all approved it.

It is plan, not a rule; but is it just to talk about or to do something about?

Do we bury our heads in the sand, or do we do some preparation to be ready for this. We should begin by drafting something so we have a proposal on the table to discuss and distribute.

Conclusion

Pro or con, the most important thing right now is to keep this on the front burner—keep the information going out in our newsletters, on the Internet, in meetings, and try to get as much feedback as possible.

6. New Business

a. With justifiable pride, Marty Hoffert announced that the Best-tasting Water at the Iowa Section meeting in Council Bluffs in October was from NEWTON.

b. A change in the January 2007 Joint Committee meeting date is needed to avoid a conflict with the national ABC Conference. By consensus, the meeting date was changed to January 26, 2007.

7. Representative Comments

a. IDNR

Laurie Sharp reported that the new OpCert web page is almost ready and should be on line in early December. It includes many changes and new information.

Electronic exams continue to be available, all Grades at all Field Offices. Acceptance is so high that very few operators are now signing up for paper exams, and IDNR is not scheduling any more paper exams after next March. (Paper exams will still be available on demand.) Operators are delighted with the turn-around time from application to receiving their certificates—normally a matter of a few days. In one case, an operator applied in the morning, was scheduled for the exam that afternoon, and his certificate was printed out and presented to him later the same day.

The Hoffert/McElvogue Amendment for Grade IV certification has gone to the EPC for information, will be presented to the EPC again in December for action, and a public hearing is scheduled for 10:00 a.m. January 24, 2007 in Des Moines. A rather raucous, divisive, confrontational hearing is expected for this highly controversial proposal; and Joint Committee members are encouraged to attend en masse to support it.

b. IAMU

Jill Soenen stated that the on-line training calendar has received an upgrade which also includes new searchable functions.

Three-hour PVC Pipe Workshops are scheduled for IAMU on December 5 and Kirkwood on December 6. This is a new training opportunity.

c. IAWWA

Dale Acheson had nothing to report.

d. IRWA

Brad Robbins reported two Small System Record-keeping and Sampling Workshops remain to be given in Independence December 5 and Clear Lake December 7.

IRWA's Annual Conference is scheduled for February 19-21 at the downtown Marriott in Des Moines.

e. ISU

Steve Jones has been involved with stormwater research activities for the last one and a half years but expects to get back to developing advanced w/ww training materials next fall.

f. IWPCA

Jim Utter had nothing to report.

g. KCC

Steve Mrstik reported that the remainder of their training schedule will be published in a separate flyer after the first of the year. Kirkwood is in the process of hiring additional training staff.

8. Assignments

Rhonda Guy – E-mail working copies of press release and longer descriptive article to all committee members for their perusal and input

Staff – Progress report on the McElvogue-Hoffert amendment

Staff – NTK progress report

Jon Martens – Affidavit subcommittee progress report

Brad Robbins – Grade A training subcommittee progress report

Jim Stricker/Jim Utter – Facilities classification subcommittee progress report

All – Do some deep thinking and bring your suggestions on WD.

9. Next Meeting

Friday, January 26, 2007, 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. at the IAMU office in Ankeny.

NOTE THE CHANGE OF DATE.

10. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn was made by Brad Robbins; seconded by Jim Stricker; motion carried. The Joint Committee adjourned at 12:12 p.m.

Harris F. Seidel, Secretary